

## STATE STATISTICS BETWEEN OBJECTIVITY AND INTERVENTION

Emmanuel DIDIER  
France Télécom R & D  
[emmanuel.didier@rd.francetelecom.com](mailto:emmanuel.didier@rd.francetelecom.com)

« Crop Reports are Hot News » wrote an agent of the U.S. Department of Agriculture sometimes during the thirties. Indeed, the publication of the reports concerning the Nation's agricultural production had important effects on the level of its markets. When an overproduction of wheat, for example, was published, its price used to fall down, and symmetrically the publication of an underproduction had the reverse effect. Public statistics *had important effects* (and still have) on the markets they intended to *describe*.

Our work gives an example of how this paradoxical relation between figures and markets have been solved. How has it become possible that statistics, which hardly avoid to influence and transform quantities and prices of the goods they count, can, at the same time, reflect them truly ? When the only fact of publishing the price of a bushel of wheat changes it, how to produce figures ?

To answer these questions, we used the archives of the bureau in the USDA which was responsible for the concrete, practical work of producing the figures. We show that a certain kind of *objectivity* has been built by this agency to justify the intervention of the Nation State on the markets, and that, by doing this, a certain kind of market *transparency* appeared.